

The National Rural Development Partnership (NRDP) is a network of established and emerging rural institutions that work together to strengthen rural America. The principal members of the network are State Rural Development Councils in 37 states.

Each of the State Councils, which are comprised of active members from a broad range of rural development-related organizations, is served by a full-time executive director. States differ in how they are organized and in the rural issues they decide to address.

This profile is one in a series highlighting the work of the State Councils.

For more information about the National Rural Development Partnership:

**National Partnership Office**

1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Room 4225-S, Mail Stop 3205  
Washington, DC 20250  
Phone: 202-690-2394  
Fax: 202-690-1262

World Wide Web:  
<http://rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp>



**National Rural  
Development  
Partnership**

# *State Profile*

## **Washington State Rural Development Council**

Established in 1990, the Washington State Rural Development Council (WSRDC) was one of eight pilot state councils created by NRDP to coordinate and leverage available resources to address the unique development problems in small communities and rural areas.

WSRDC's previous accomplishments include its work on streamlined planning processes, welfare reform, networking, secondary impacts of the Endangered Species Act, rural telecommunications, and the Governor's rural summits. Concerned, however, that its image was too closely tied to the state government and falsely conveyed a top-down mentality, the Council replaced much of its process and policy with grass-roots activism. As WSRDC chair Bob Swanson notes, "You can't be an advocate for rural communities if you are not willing to go out and listen to the people who work and live the reality of rural areas." Putting this philosophy into action,



Executive Director Jim Lowery, who joined WSRDC in November 1998, brings his knowledge of state government and rural communities and an activist spirit to the Council.

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## **Contacting WSRDC**

**Jim Lowery**

Executive Director  
Washington State  
Rural Development Council  
P.O. Box 11790  
Olympia, WA 98508-1790  
Phone: 360/943-5151  
Fax 360/357-3548

E-mail:  
[jlowery@scattercreek.com](mailto:jlowery@scattercreek.com)

Website:  
<http://www.yo-partner.com>

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An Executive Committee made up of 14 members, 9 of whom must live in rural communities, governs WSRDC. Membership includes members at-large and the chair and representatives of the agriculture, business, economic development, education, environment, health, human services, and natural resources sectors and of tribal, local, county, and federal governments. Ex-officio members include:

- ▼ US Department of Agriculture
- ▼ USDA Rural Development
- ▼ USDA Forest Service
- ▼ USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- ▼ US Environmental Protection Agency
- ▼ Washington State Governor's Office
- ▼ Washington State Community, Trade, and Economic Development



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## NRDP *State Profile*

August 2000

### Washington State Rural Development Council at Work

#### Non-Profit Status to Strengthen Rural Advocacy

On Thursday May 13, 1999, Governor Locke signed House Bill 1313, allowing the WSRDC to devolve from the Washington State Community, Trade, and Economic Development Agency and become a private non-profit organization. With its new status, the Council is better positioned to develop private and public partnerships and be a neutral organization for rural advocacy. WSRDC has formed a new committee to determine how best to raise private/public resources to serve Washington's communities through better staffing, small grants for rural projects, and targeted tasks.

*"We are working to become **the** voice and resource for rural communities in Washington state."*

**Bob Swanson,  
Executive Director  
of WA State  
Association of  
Community Action  
Agencies**

agencies to provide local residents the opportunity to identify and prioritize issues of concern to their communities. Executive Director Lowery personally conducts outreach as well, spending considerable time on the road and in Washington's rural communities listening to the needs and ideas of its rural residents.

#### Working Document Targets Key Rural Issues

Information gleaned from WSRDC's outreach efforts has been condensed into a discussion paper, "Washington State Rural Communities Speak Out." The discussion paper synthesizes the salient ideas, concerns, and suggestions of Washington's rural residents. In addition to publicizing rural issues, the Council plans to use this paper as a tool in policy debates and to support its legislative lobbying efforts.

#### Outreach in Action: Business Climate Forums, Listening Sessions, and ED Activities

In its ongoing effort to represent the voice of rural Washington, WSRDC has conducted extensive outreach through business climate forums, listening sessions, and the activities of its highly mobile executive director, Jim Lowery. The Council held seven business climate forums in 1999 in rural communities so that local small businesses could discuss the challenges they face in increasing profits and employee numbers. Additional outreach activities were implemented through each WSRDC quarterly Board meeting, which included a listening session held jointly with several USDA

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#### Using Telecommunications as a Development Tool

WSRDC's telecommunications committee, active since 1996, is sponsoring a pilot telecommunications project in Klickitat County. The committee is working to identify how to help rural communities access telecommunications as a community development tool for hospitals, education, libraries, and public services. It is also trying to target how telecommunications access in rural communities could catalyze economic development.